

December Fourteenth, 2018

The Honorable Ajit Pai, Chairman;
The Honorable Michael O’Rielly, Commissioner
The Honorable Brendan Carr, Commissioner
The Honorable Jessica Rosenworcel, Commissioner

Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
455 12th Street, Southwest
Washington, DC, 20544

Dear Chairman Pai,

We write to support the Comments of Catamount Access Television and the Cable Act Preservation Alliance (CAPA) to disapprove of the proposals and tentative conclusions set forth in the FCC’s September 25 Further Notice of Proposed Rule Making in *Implementation of Section 621(a)(1) of the Cable Communications Policy Act of 1984 as Amended by the Cable Television Consumer Protection and Competition Act of 1992*, MB Docket 05-311.

It is impossible to overestimate the value that access television brings to the community. At its most basic level, access television provides the members of the community with a forum to express themselves (within clearly established standards of decency) in a free and unfettered way, without the influence or constraints of publishers, editors, stock holders or other controllers of media. Free speech is an essential tenet of our American democracy and must be protected at all times. In addition, access television provides coverage of community events, from Fourth of July parades to Select Board meetings and Candidate Forums which is simply not available from other media outlets.

As regulated and protected monopolies, cable service providers must be held to a higher standard of civic good. It is reasonable to require regulated and protected monopolies to divert a small fraction of their enormous profits to serving the public. Laws and rules which deprive access television providers of necessary revenue threaten the very existence of these essential bastions of freedom and democracy.

This local presence enables the residents of our town to watch uniquely local programming about their community and local events and issues of interest to them. And that was the intent of the PEG provisions of the 1984 Cable Act – to enhance local voices, serve local community needs and interests, and strengthen our local democracy. By defining “franchise fee” in an overly broad fashion to include “in-kind” support, the FCC’s proposals will shift the fair balance between cable franchising authorities and cable operators and will force communities to choose between franchise fees and PEG channels – something that was never the intent of the Act.

We appreciate your consideration and hope you will protect PEG Access in our community and others by choosing not to adopt many of the proposals in the Further Notice.

Sincerely,

Robert Ebert
Member, Board of Directors
Catamount Access Television
Bennington, Vermont